



**RACE, INJUSTICE  
& DISCIPLESHIP**

# **RACE INJUSTICE & DISCIPLESHIP**



**EVERY NATION**  
RESOURCES

## **RACE, INJUSTICE & DISCIPLESHIP**

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# AUTHORS

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## **JUSTIN GRAY**

Justin is the director of Every Nation Music, a global community of songwriters. He is passionate about training songwriters and helping churches make the connection between music and discipleship. In addition to his musical work with Every Nation Music, he has written and produced songs for The Winans family, Out of Eden, Mary Mary, CitiPointe Worship, and Common Hymnal, among others. He and his wife, Mashon, live in Nashville, Tennessee, with their four kids. Justin serves as a volunteer member of the pastoral team at his local church.



## **WILLIAM MURRELL, PH.D**

William is a professor of history and the academic dean of Every Nation Seminary. He has degrees in history from Oxford University (MSt) and Vanderbilt University (PhD) and specializes in the history of Christian mission and the history of Islam. He and his wife, Rachel, have three young children and live in Nashville, Tennessee. William volunteers with his local church in multiple ways, including teaching children's ministry and church history classes, as well as leading small groups on campus and in his home.



# INTRODUCTION

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility . . .

**Ephesians 2:13–14**

“There’s a false rumor around that our leader’s dead. Our leader is not dead. Martin Luther King is not our leader. Our leader is the man who led Moses out of Israel. Our leader is the man who went with Daniel into the lion’s den. Our leader is the man who walked out of the grave on Easter morning. Our leader never sleeps nor slumbers. He cannot be put in jail. He has never lost a war yet. Our leader is still on the case. Our leader is not dead. One of his prophets died. We will not stop because of that.”

**James Bevel, Martin Luther King Jr’s funeral, 1968**

# ORIGINS

## WHY WE WROTE THIS MATERIAL

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*For the leader to read before leading Session 1*

The summer of 2016 was a moment of great shaking for race relations in the United States.

In three brutal days, July 5–7, Americans witnessed on video the unjust police killings of two African American men, Alton Sterling and Philando Castille, as well as the killings of five Dallas police officers in response.

It was as though the veil had been pulled away for just a few days to reveal generations of pain and mistrust between black and white Americans and the unresolved and unrelenting problem of racism in America.

Being active members of a multiethnic church in Nashville, Tennessee, we (Justin and William) were able to see firsthand how these tragic events affected individuals in our church and strained relationships between black and white church members. To make matters even more polarizing, we were just a few months away from a national presidential election between Hilary Clinton and Donald Trump.

After having many private conversations with one another and close friends from church, we felt called to start a multiethnic small group to address the problems of race and injustice from a discipleship perspective. In other words, rather than talking about what politicians and activists should do to fix racial injustice in America, we looked at ourselves and asked: How should we respond to this crisis as disciples of Jesus? How do we engage these issues in our church and in our community?

We found these questions daunting but not insurmountable. Over the next few years, these small groups expanded to discussion panels, academic research, and Bible studies all oriented toward understanding and addressing the relationship between race, injustice, and discipleship.

This resource is the result of our own wrestling and reckoning with these topics. In this small group material, we will be walking through the life of Jesus and his disciples and considering how his life, death, and resurrection

apply to the racial injustices of our time. It is our desire that every scripture, quote, prayer, and conversation prompt will guide you in understanding how God calls us to engage racism and injustice as followers of Jesus from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

## OUTCOME OBJECTIVES

### WHAT WE HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH

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*For the leader to read aloud to the small group before beginning week one. We also highly recommend that these are referenced before the start of each session.*

By the end of this small group series, our prayer is that every participant will grow in . . .

- ☑ **Relational Trust** — Deep relationships require transparency and trust. Through sharing our experiences and listening to those of others, we hope to develop compassion and empathy towards one another resulting in deep friendships with people of other ethnicities and cultural backgrounds.
  
- ☑ **Genuine Repentance** — Repentance is the act of turning away from sin and turning to God in righteousness. When addressing far-reaching and complicated topics like racism and injustice, it can be difficult to pinpoint ways we have sinned against God and others. The acronym **(PAUSE)** provides a grid to help us be specific as we allow the Holy Spirit to search our hearts:
  - **Prejudice** — a prejudgment based solely on race that leads to unfair treatment.
  - **Apathy** — an attitude of indifference toward racial pain and suffering.
  - **Unforgiveness** — a resistance to extending mercy to those who have offended us.
  - **Self-Righteousness** — a prideful posture toward those who are at different points in their journey of repentance and reconciliation.
  - **Ethnic Idolatry** — the belief that one's own ethnicity or culture is superior to all others.



- ☑ **Gospel Hope** — The hope of the Christian faith hinges upon the resurrection of Jesus. We live in the great in-between of his first and second coming—a time filled with both celebration and suffering. As we navigate this space of pursuing justice and loving mercy, we must keep our expectations anchored in our future together in Christ.

## RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

### HOW TO USE THIS SMALL GROUP MATERIAL

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In his book, *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High*, Joseph Grenny addresses the difficulties of setting the table to discuss tough topics. He defines a “crucial conversation” as “a discussion between two or more people where the stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions run strong.” He observes that crucial conversations are hard, in part, because we find ourselves trying to listen to others while also telling a story to ourselves. Our emotional reactions to these stories lead us to respond along a spectrum of silence or violence. Listening well and engaging in a compassionate way with one another’s stories and opinions make all the difference in the quality of our conversations.

This resource is a tool to set the table in our churches and small groups for biblical conversations about racism and injustice. At some point in the journey through this material, you may reach points of tension with others who participate. Because our aim is to engage racism as a discipleship issue, we have provided three guidelines and a simple prayer to help orient your heart for these important conversations:

- ☑ **Be Honest** — Speaking truthfully will help avoid perpetuating deception and flattery as you seek to build deep and meaningful relationships with others in the group.

“Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.”

EPHESIANS 4:25

- ☑ **Be Loving** — We should strive for the love of God to inform all of our interactions during these times together.

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“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4–7

- ☑ **Be Hopeful** — Exploring sensitive topics and historical events are not the final destination of this resource or these small groups. We want the Holy Spirit to give us eyes to see the problems we’re facing through the lens of hope and redemption.

“For we walk by faith, not by sight.” 2 CORINTHIANS 5:7

## RECOMMENDED FORMAT

60–90 MINUTES

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### SHARE & LISTEN *20–30 MIN*

This section is designed for every small group participant to share personal experiences related to the session topic. It’s very important for the leader to ask the questions without teaching or commentary to allow people to be honest and vulnerable with the group. Relational trust is the goal.

### READ & DISCUSS *20–30 MIN*

This section is designed for the group to engage the scriptures and apply them to their current context. We recommend that the leader or a group participant read the scriptures aloud in the group. Try to avoid consuming the time with analysis of current events or excessive commentary on the text. In order to help the leader, we have provided a brief “Commentary” paragraph that the leader can read beforehand or aloud to the group. We also have included a “Gospel Hope” paragraph which can be read aloud to summarize the key point of the scriptures in relation to the topic. If sensitive personal issues arise, know that there will be time to address heart issues in-depth in the next section. Gospel hope is the goal.

### CONFESS & PRAY *20–30 MIN*

This section is designed to promote biblical reflection and invite the Holy Spirit to minister to each participant. There will be an opportunity to acknowledge pain, identify and confess sin (using the PAUSE acronym), and pray. We

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highly recommend that each person take time, before God and the group, to acknowledge sinful thoughts and behaviors; however, no one should feel obligated to share, pray, or repent each week. Allow each participant to be led by the Holy Spirit. Genuine repentance is the goal.

### **NOTE ON GROUP SIZE, MAKE-UP, AND LEADERSHIP**

- ☑ **Size** — We recommend groups between four to ten people. Given the nature of the discussion, groups that are larger than ten are difficult to facilitate and difficult to complete in 90 minutes.
- ☑ **Make-up** — We strongly recommend using this material in the context of a multiethnic group. We cannot build relational trust and foster reconciliation across ethnic divides if we do not have these conversations together.
- ☑ **Leadership** — We strongly recommend that a multiethnic leadership team facilitate this material together. From our experience, this set-up enables the leaders to gauge how different people in the group are responding to the difficult conversations (and potential disagreements) that may arise.

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## ***A Prayer For Justice***

*from the Book of Common Prayer*

*Almighty God, who created us in your image:  
Grant us grace fearlessly to contend against evil  
and to make no peace with oppression;  
and, that we may reverently use our freedom,  
help us to employ it in the maintenance of justice  
in our communities and among the nations,  
to the glory of your holy Name;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with  
you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever. Amen.*





“A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping.

Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.”

**Jeremiah 31:15**

“Dead! My brother dead. All that army stuff about making the world safe for democracy. All that fighting someplace off in Europe didn’t get him killed. He had come home safe from the white man’s war only to be shot down six months later by a white man in his own hometown.”

**John M. Perkins, *Let Justice Roll Down***

## SHARE & LISTEN

20-30 MIN

*Leader asks, everyone responds.*

- 🗨 At what age did you first experience or observe the reality of racism? What happened? How did you process that experience?

## READ & DISCUSS

20-30 MIN

### OLD TESTAMENT READING

*Ask a group member to read aloud.*

#### **Exodus 1:8–16, 2:1–3, 2:23–25**

<sup>8</sup>Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. <sup>9</sup>And he said to his people, “Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. <sup>10</sup>Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” <sup>11</sup>Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. <sup>12</sup>But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel.<sup>13</sup> So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves <sup>14</sup>and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.<sup>15</sup> Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, <sup>16</sup>“When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.”

<sup>1</sup>Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. <sup>2</sup>The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months. <sup>3</sup>When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank.

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<sup>23</sup> During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. <sup>24</sup> And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. <sup>25</sup> God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.

### NEW TESTAMENT READING

*Ask a group member to read aloud.*

#### **Matthew 2:1–4, 13–18**

<sup>1</sup> Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” <sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

<sup>13</sup> Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” <sup>14</sup> And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt <sup>15</sup> and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

<sup>16</sup> Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. <sup>17</sup> Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

<sup>18</sup> “A voice was heard in Ramah,  
weeping and loud lamentation,  
Rachel weeping for her children;  
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”



## DISCUSS

*Leader asks, anyone responds.*

- 🗨️ Why do you think that God chose for Moses and Jesus to be born at a time when the Jews were oppressed (by Egypt and later Rome)? What does this tell us about God's response to human suffering?
- 🗨️ Why do you think Matthew quoted Jeremiah (in verse 17) when talking about Herod's massacre of Jewish boys? What does this teach us about lament?

## COMMENTARY

*Leader reads beforehand or aloud during the group.*

The Jewish people were no strangers to injustice and oppression. Centuries before the Roman occupation of Israel in the time of Jesus, the Israelites had endured centuries of slavery in Egypt. When their population grew, Pharaoh ordered the midwives to kill all of the baby boys born to Jewish mothers.

Like Moses, Jesus was born in the context of genocide. Many of the hymns sung during the Christmas holiday depict the birth of Christ as a joyous occasion filled with angelic praise and celebration: the newborn king pictured bringing peace on earth and salvation to the nations. And while these things are true and even more clear as we look back into history through the lens of Jesus' resurrection, Matthew's incarnation story brings some much-needed context.

In chapter 2, we see Herod, a puppet king under Roman authority, conspiring to capture and kill Jesus. He sees this newborn "King of the Jews" as a threat to his throne and orchestrates a regional Jewish infant genocide to ensure that Jesus does not rise to his ranks. These are the details left out of the Christmas songs but are nonetheless significant to Jesus' earthly experience: a brown boy in the clutches of sociopolitical oppression and injustice. It's shocking, but this was the time, place, and body in which Jesus chose to be born.

## GOSPEL HOPE

*Leader to read aloud during group.*

***God sees injustice, hears the cries of the oppressed, and is present in their suffering.***

In the Old Testament, God saw the suffering of the Israelites in Egypt and sent Moses to deliver them. However, in the New Testament, when God saw the suffering of the Israelites in Roman-occupied Palestine, he sent his son, Jesus, to be with his people in their suffering and to deliver them. This child born in Galilee would become the “man of sorrows . . . acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3); a high priest who could sympathize with a hurting world and yet not succumb to its forces of evil. Where can we find God in the injustices of our day? How is he present in our suffering? Through the Church. The Church is the body of Christ—God’s means of being present in a world filled with suffering. Activists and politicians all play a role in fighting injustice, but it is through the Church that God by his Spirit makes himself most present. And like Jesus in the flesh, the Church is the embodiment of God’s redemptive love. We are a people touched by suffering but empowered by God’s presence to give voice to our pain in a way that brings hope and healing.

## DISCUSS

*Leader asks, anyone responds.*

- 🗨 How do the stories of Moses’ and Jesus’ births in times of injustice give you hope for our current situation?
- 🗨 How does Matthew’s use of Jeremiah provide us a model for practices of lament in the present day?

# CONFESS & PRAY

20-30 MIN

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- ✔ Listen in silence to the Holy Spirit for two minutes and reflect on these questions:  
  
**REPENT:** Is there anything I need to repent of—**p**rejudice, **a**pathy, **u**nforgiveness, **s**elf-righteousness, or **e**thnic idolatry? In what ways can I practically respond to this change of heart?  
  
**LAMENT:** Is there any specific injustice (past or present) that God is calling me to lament? In what ways is God softening my heart and calling me to share his heart for the oppressed?
- ✔ Open the floor for participants who feel led by the Spirit to pray aloud a specific prayer of repentance (and/or lament) before God and those in your group. (Ex., “Lord, I repent of . . .” or “Lord, I lament . . .”) Be specific. Be honest. And be concise.
- ✔ Pray for one another based on what was just shared, and ask God to help us—the Church—embody God’s redemptive love in places of injustice and oppression.

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***Oh! Let My People Go* (1862)**

*The Lord, by Moses, to Pharaoh said: Oh! let my people go  
If not, I'll smite your first-born dead—Oh! let my people go*

*Oh! go down, Moses  
Away down to Egypt's land  
And tell King Pharaoh  
To let my people go*





WEEK TWO

# REPENTANCE & FORGIVENESS

“Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.”

**Joel 2:12–13**

“I think many of us want forgiveness without repentance. I sense this so much as I try to establish relationships with my white brethren in the South. I find that they want my relationship, but they want more to quickly forget the brutality and the injustice that their people put upon many of us in the name of Christianity.”

**John M. Perkins, *Let Justice Roll Down***

## SHARE & LISTEN

20-30 MIN

*Leader asks, everyone responds.*

- 🗣️ Has anyone ever repented to you for the sin of racism? Or have you ever repented of racial prejudice? What was that experience like?
- 🗣️ Why do you think repentance and forgiveness are so difficult when it comes to issues of racial injustice?

## READ & DISCUSS

20-30 MIN

### OLD TESTAMENT READING

*Ask a group member to read aloud.*

#### Joel 2:12-17

<sup>12</sup>“Yet even now,” declares the Lord,  
“return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;  
<sup>13</sup>and rend your hearts and not your garments.”

Return to the Lord your God,  
for he is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;  
and he relents over disaster.

<sup>14</sup>Who knows whether he will not turn and relent,  
and leave a blessing behind him,  
a grain offering and a drink offering  
for the Lord your God?

<sup>15</sup>Blow the trumpet in Zion;  
consecrate a fast;  
call a solemn assembly;  
<sup>16</sup>gather the people.  
Consecrate the congregation;  
assemble the elders;

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gather the children,  
even nursing infants.  
Let the bridegroom leave his room,  
and the bride her chamber.

<sup>17</sup> Between the vestibule and the altar  
let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep  
and say, "Spare your people, O Lord,  
and make not your heritage a reproach,  
a byword among the nations.  
Why should they say among the peoples,  
'Where is their God?'"

### NEW TESTAMENT READING

*Ask a group member to read aloud.*

#### **Luke 3:2–16**

<sup>2</sup> During the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup> And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>4</sup> As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:  
'Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.  
Every valley shall be filled,  
<sup>5</sup> and every mountain and hill shall be made low,  
and the crooked shall become straight,  
and the rough places shall become level ways,  
<sup>6</sup> and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

<sup>7</sup> He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones



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to raise up children for Abraham. <sup>9</sup>Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

<sup>10</sup> And the crowds asked him, “What then shall we do?” <sup>11</sup> And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.” <sup>12</sup> Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” <sup>13</sup> And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.” <sup>14</sup> Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.”

<sup>15</sup> As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, <sup>16</sup> John answered them all, saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

### DISCUSS

*Leader asks, anyone responds.*

- What are the similarities and differences between Joel's call to repentance in the Old Testament and John's call to repentance in the New Testament? What do these passages teach us about repentance and forgiveness?
- Why do you think John the Baptist was so specific in calling out injustices? If John the Baptist were preaching in our cities, what specific racial injustices might he call out, and what acts of repentance might he prescribe for us today?

### COMMENTARY

*Leader reads beforehand or aloud during the group.*

Almost 600 years before John the Baptist was born, the prophet Isaiah saw the day when a voice would cry from the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord. John's call to repentance rang throughout the entire region challenging every person to turn from sin to righteousness.

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Interestingly, this challenge came in the form of calling out people's lack of compassion and abuses of power. John addresses three groups in this passage: 1) the crowds, predominantly common folk, 2) tax collectors, and 3) soldiers.

In each case, John prescribes acts of repentance that entail both spiritual transformation and social change. Amongst the common folk, those who had more food and clothing than others are challenged to share with those in need. The tax collectors, despised for their complicity in oppressive Roman taxation and frequently taking more than what was authorized, are called to stop overtaxing the people. Finally, the soldiers (akin to our modern-day military and police) are confronted for their abuse of power in "extorting, threatening, and falsely accusing" citizens.

### GOSPEL HOPE

*Leader to read aloud during group.*

***God demands repentance and restitution, but he also, through Jesus, promises forgiveness.***

Embedded in the idea of repentance is the promise of forgiveness and life change. And this is where Joel and John's messages are incomplete without Jesus. John understood that his call to righteous living was only preparing the way for the One with the power to forgive sins and purify God's people. He recognized that only Jesus is able to raise the low places, and lower the high places, and make straight what is crooked to reveal the glory of God.

### DISCUSS

*Leader asks, anyone responds.*

- ⦿ What happens if we seek forgiveness without repentance or demand repentance without extending forgiveness?
- ⦿ How does God's promise of forgiveness and transformation provide us hope to deal with racism in our hearts and our communities?

# CONFESS & PRAY

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20-30 MIN

- ☑ Listen in silence to the Holy Spirit for two minutes and reflect on these questions:  
  
**REPENT:** Is there anything I need to repent of—**prejudice, apathy, unforgiveness, self-righteousness, or ethnic idolatry?** In what ways can I practically respond to this change of heart?  
  
**FORGIVE:** Is there anyone I need to forgive for racial insensitivity, prejudice, exclusion, etc.?
- ☑ Open the floor for participants who feel led by the Spirit to pray aloud a specific prayer of repentance and/or forgiveness before God and those in your group. (Ex., “Lord, I repent of. . . .” or “Lord, I forgive . . .”) Be specific. Be honest. And be concise.
- ☑ Pray for one another based on what was just shared, and ask God to help us as the Church to model a lifestyle of repentance and forgiveness in the context of a multiethnic community.

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***Let Us Break Bread Together On Our Knees* (1926)**

*Let us break bread together on our knees,*

*Let us break bread together on our knees,*

*When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun,*

*O Lord have mercy on me.*

*Let us drink wine together on our knees,*

*Let us drink wine together on our knees.*

*When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun,*

*O Lord have mercy on me.*

*Let us praise God together on our knees,*

*Let us praise God together on our knees.*

*When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun,*

*O Lord have mercy if you please.*





*WEEK THREE*

**LOVE &  
ACTION**

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

**Leviticus 19:18**

“Let us develop a kind of dangerous unselfishness. One day a man came to Jesus; and he wanted to raise some questions about some vital matters in life. At points, he wanted to trick Jesus, and show him that he knew a little more than Jesus knew, and through this, throw him off base. Now that question could have easily ended up in a philosophical and theological debate. But Jesus immediately pulled that question from mid-air and placed it on a dangerous curve between Jerusalem and Jericho.”

**Martin Luther King Jr., “I’ve Been to the Mountain Top.” — April 3, 1968**

## SHARE & LISTEN

20-30 MIN

*Leader asks, everyone responds.*

- ⦿ What is the ethnic make-up of your neighborhood? Do most of your neighbors look like you? Do you know your neighbors well? If so, which ones?
- ⦿ Are you aware of any historic tensions or injustices between ethnic groups in your neighborhood or city?

## READ & DISCUSS

20-30 MIN

### OLD TESTAMENT READING

*Ask a group member to read aloud.*

#### **Leviticus 19:11-18**

<sup>11</sup>“You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. <sup>12</sup>You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.

<sup>13</sup>“You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning. <sup>14</sup>You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord.

<sup>15</sup>“You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. <sup>16</sup>You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the Lord.

<sup>17</sup>“You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. <sup>18</sup>You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

## NEW TESTAMENT READING

*Ask a group member to read aloud.*

### Luke 10:25–37

<sup>25</sup> And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>26</sup> He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” <sup>27</sup> And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>28</sup> And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

<sup>29</sup> But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” <sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ <sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” <sup>37</sup> He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

## DISCUSS

*Leader asks, anyone responds.*

- Why do you think the lawyer asked Jesus the question: “Who is my neighbor”? Why might the lawyer have wanted to keep the definition of “neighbor” as narrow as possible?
- How does Jesus’ answer surprise him? How does the parable of the good Samaritan relate to or clarify the law of Moses (especially Leviticus 19)?



## COMMENTARY

*Leader reads beforehand or aloud during the group.*

The story of the good Samaritan is one of Jesus' most provocative parables. This lesson begins with a very common biblical idea—loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself—but ends with an unexpected twist. During Jesus' time, the Mosaic law was being manipulated by different Jewish factions to justify their particular response to the problem of Roman oppression. The common Jewish people found themselves not only oppressed by the Romans but torn between their commitment to God and these groups constantly lobbying for the political and religious upper hand.

In this context, a lawyer, known as an expert in the Mosaic law, asks the question, "Who is my neighbor?" as a way to entrap Jesus. Jesus responds by telling a story where a Samaritan, an ethnic group despised by the Jews, shows neighborly kindness to a brutalized traveler after being passed by a Jewish priest and a Levite. While the religious elite narrowed their application of the Mosaic law to support their religious and sociopolitical positions, Jesus expanded it—calling his disciples into a kingdom where everyone is treated with dignity and loving care regardless of ethnicity or culture.

## GOSPEL HOPE

*Leader to read aloud during group.*

***Jesus explodes our ethnic and cultural definitions of "neighbor" and calls us to love others how he loved us.***

The Mosaic law, summed up in loving our neighbors just as we love ourselves, is an easy task if we get to define who our neighbor is. It is a much more difficult thing if we allow Jesus to define it. By nature, we are inclined to love people who look like us, think like us, and share our cultural, ethnic, and economic background. However, Jesus calls his followers to something much greater and much more difficult. Jesus calls us to treat ethnic and cultural others as neighbors with the hope that they might one day become family.

## DISCUSS

*Leader asks, anyone responds.*

- 🗨️ How does the story of the good Samaritan challenge our ethnic and cultural stereotypes? In what ways do we narrow our definition of “neighbor” based on religious, ethnic, and/or political affiliations?
- 🗨️ In light of “the golden rule,” how can we put our imaginations to work for the good of all people? Share a few examples with your group.

## CONFESS & PRAY

20-30 MIN

- ☑️ Listen in silence to the Holy Spirit for two minutes and reflect on these two questions:

**REPENT:** Is there anything I need to repent of—**prejudice, apathy, unforgiveness, self-righteousness, or ethnic idolatry?**

**ACT:** How is God expanding my definition of “neighbor” and calling me to love and serve someone who doesn’t look like me?

- ☑️ Open the floor for participants who feel led by the Spirit to pray aloud a specific prayer of repentance and/or commitment before God and those in your group. (Ex., “Lord, I repent of . . .” or “Lord, I commit to . . .”) Be specific. Be honest. And be concise.
- ☑️ Pray that God will explode our narrow, self-serving definitions of “neighbors” and open our hearts to love others in both word and deed.

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***Pass Me Not, O Gentle Saviour* (1854)**

*Pass me not, o gentle saviour*

*Hear my humble cry*

*While on others thou art calling*

*Do not pass me by*

*Saviour, saviour*

*Hear my humble cry*

*While on others thou art calling*

*Do not pass me by.*



*WEEK FOUR*  
**JUSTICE &  
RECONCILIATION**

Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, That glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed. Truth shall spring out of the earth, And righteousness shall look down from heaven.

**Psalm 85:9–11, NKJV**

“Forgiving and being reconciled to our enemies or our loved ones are not about pretending that things are other than they are. It is not about patting one another on the back and turning a blind eye to the wrong. True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the hurt, the truth. It could even sometimes make things worse. It is a risky undertaking but in the end it is worthwhile, because in the end only an honest confrontation with reality can bring real healing. Superficial reconciliation can bring only superficial healing.”

**Archbishop Desmond Tutu**

## SHARE & LISTEN

20-30 MIN

*Leader asks, everyone responds.*

- 🗨 Have you ever experienced or observed a situation where justice was served but reconciliation never occurred?
- 🗨 What was the outcome for the victim and the perpetrator? Why is reconciliation so difficult?

## READ & DISCUSS

20-30 MIN

### OLD TESTAMENT READING

*Ask a group member to read aloud.*

#### **Micah 6:1-4, 6-8**

<sup>1</sup>Hear what the Lord says:

Arise, plead your case before the mountains,  
and let the hills hear your voice.

<sup>2</sup>Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the Lord,  
and you enduring foundations of the earth,  
for the Lord has an indictment against his people,  
and he will contend with Israel.

<sup>3</sup>“O my people, what have I done to you?  
How have I wearied you? Answer me!

<sup>4</sup>For I brought you up from the land of Egypt  
and redeemed you from the house of slavery,  
and I sent before you Moses,  
Aaron, and Miriam.

<sup>6</sup>“With what shall I come before the Lord,  
and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?

## RACE, INJUSTICE & DISCIPLESHIP

<sup>7</sup>Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

<sup>8</sup>He has told you, O man, what is good;  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?

### NEW TESTAMENT READING

*Ask a group member to read aloud.*

#### **Luke 23:33–46**

<sup>33</sup>And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. <sup>34</sup>And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. <sup>35</sup>And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" <sup>36</sup>The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine <sup>37</sup>and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" <sup>38</sup>There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

<sup>39</sup>One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" <sup>40</sup>But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? <sup>41</sup>And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." <sup>42</sup>And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." <sup>43</sup>And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

<sup>44</sup>It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, <sup>45</sup>while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. <sup>46</sup>Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.

### DISCUSS

*Leader asks, anyone responds.*

- 🗨️ How does the life and death of Jesus relate to Micah's prophetic appeal to the people of Israel? How does this speak to us today?
- 🗨️ In what ways does God stir your heart as you read the crucifixion account? How do you see justice and reconciliation in this passage?

### COMMENTARY

*Leader reads beforehand or aloud during the group.*

The brown boy who escaped the murderous plan of Herod now hangs as a bloodied man from a Roman cross. Just hours earlier, Jesus stood in the court of Pontius Pilate, the governor of Judea, hearing the shouts of his own people condemning him to death even though he had been declared innocent. The system crushed him, his friends left him, and it seemed his God had forsaken him. What kind of justice is this? How could these atrocities possibly be reconciled?

We hear this seemingly irreconcilable tension played out in the conversation between the two thieves. One says to Jesus, "Deliver us here!" while the other says "Remember me there." Both thieves ask Jesus to meet a desperately urgent need—one temporal, the other eternal. What neither one of the thieves could see was that Jesus was doing exceedingly more than either of them were asking. Through his sinless death, the just was sacrificed for the unjust and hopeless humanity was being reconciled to God. Jesus was in fact delivering us here and remembering us there. In one cosmic act of obedience, he was overturning an oppressive and sin-sick world system and ushering redeemed humanity into his eternal kingdom. An innocent man hanging from a cross seems the least likely place for these events to unfold, but this was God's plan of redemption. The innocent died on behalf of the guilty. Therefore making peace between God and man.

## GOSPEL HOPE

*Leader to read aloud during group.*

***Through the cross, Jesus exceeds our expectations for justice and reconciliation by restoring the victim and the victimizer and by giving us hope in this world and in the world to come.***

God requires his people to do justice, love kindness, and to walk humbly with him. The cross of Christ is where the justice and reconciliation of God are fulfilled. On the cross, God in Jesus secured justice for every victim of injustice, and at the same time, bore the punishment for every perpetrator of injustice. God did this because he is not only seeking to restore the victim but to redeem the victimizer. He is not only on the side of the oppressed but actively seeking to win over the oppressor to the side of righteousness. This is good news because we are all victims and victimizers, oppressed and oppressors, plaintiffs and defendants. We all want Jesus to deliver us “here,” but we need him to remember us “there.” The cross of Christ makes provision for both.

## DISCUSS

*Leader asks, anyone responds.*

- ☞ Which one of these statuses do you most identify with—a victim of injustice, a perpetrator of injustice, or a neutral player (who is neither victim nor oppressor)? Why?
- ☞ How does the gospel undermine narratives of exclusive victimhood as well as narratives of exclusive neutrality?



# CONFESS & PRAY

20-30 MIN

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- ☑ Listen in silence to the Holy Spirit for two minutes and reflect on these questions:

**REPENT:** Is there anything I need to repent of—**p**rejudice, **a**pathy, **u**nforgiveness, **s**elf-righteousness, or **e**thnic idolatry?

**RECONCILE:** Is there any person (or group) I need to be reconciled with? What is keeping me from taking those initial steps toward reconciliation?

- ☑ Open the floor for participants who feel led by the Spirit to pray aloud a specific prayer of repentance and/or commitment before God and those in your group. (Ex., “Lord, I repent of . . .” or “Lord, I commit to . . .”) Be specific. Be honest. And be concise.
- ☑ Pray that God will give us his heart for racial justice and reconciliation. Pray that we would find our hope and our model in the cross of Christ.

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***There Is a Balm in Gilead* (1854)**

*There is a balm in Gilead  
To make the wounded whole;  
There is a balm in Gilead  
To heal the sin-sick soul.  
Sometimes I feel discouraged,  
And think my work's in vain,  
But then the Holy Spirit  
Revives my soul again.  
If you cannot sing like angels,  
If you can't preach like Paul,  
You can tell the love of Jesus,  
And say He died for all.*





He says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

**Isaiah 49:6**

“How does one remain loyal both to the demand of the oppressed for justice and to the gift of forgiveness that the Crucified offered to the perpetrators? . . . I felt that my very faith was at odds with itself, divided between the God who delivers the needy and the God who abandons the Crucified, between the demand to bring about justice for the victims and the call to embrace the perpetrator . . . My people were being brutalized, and I needed to think through the response appropriate for me, a follower of the crucified Messiah.”

**Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace***

## SHARE & LISTEN

20-30 MIN

*Leader asks, everyone responds.*

- 🗣️ Have you ever struggled to reconcile your ethnic or cultural identity with the mission of the Church? If so, how?
- 🗣️ Describe a time when you were compelled to cross ethnic and cultural lines to minister to someone. What did you learn from that experience?

## READ & DISCUSS

20-30 MIN

### OLD TESTAMENT READING

*Ask a group member to read aloud.*

#### Isaiah 49:6-12

<sup>6</sup>He says:

“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant  
to raise up the tribes of Jacob  
and to bring back the preserved of Israel;  
I will make you as a light for the nations,  
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

<sup>7</sup>Thus says the Lord,

the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One,  
to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation,  
the servant of rulers:

“Kings shall see and arise;  
princes, and they shall prostrate themselves;  
because of the Lord, who is faithful,  
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”

<sup>8</sup>Thus says the Lord:

“In a time of favor I have answered you;  
in a day of salvation I have helped you;  
I will keep you and give you  
as a covenant to the people,

## RACE, INJUSTICE & DISCIPLESHIP

to establish the land,  
to apportion the desolate heritages,  
<sup>9</sup>saying to the prisoners, 'Come out,'  
to those who are in darkness, 'Appear.'  
They shall feed along the ways;  
on all bare heights shall be their pasture;  
<sup>10</sup>they shall not hunger or thirst,  
neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them,  
for he who has pity on them will lead them,  
and by springs of water will guide them.  
<sup>11</sup>And I will make all my mountains a road,  
and my highways shall be raised up.  
<sup>12</sup>Behold, these shall come from afar,  
and behold, these from the north and from the west,  
and these from the land of Syene."

### NEW TESTAMENT READING

*Ask a group member to read aloud.*

#### **Acts 11:1–18 NIV**

<sup>1</sup>The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. <sup>2</sup>So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him <sup>3</sup> and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them."

<sup>4</sup>Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story: <sup>5</sup>"I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. <sup>6</sup>I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles and birds. <sup>7</sup>Then I heard a voice telling me, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.'

<sup>8</sup>"I replied, 'Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.'

## RACE, INJUSTICE & DISCIPLESHIP

<sup>9</sup>“The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ <sup>10</sup>This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.

<sup>11</sup>“Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. <sup>12</sup>The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man’s house. <sup>13</sup>He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. <sup>14</sup>He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’

<sup>15</sup>“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. <sup>16</sup>Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ <sup>17</sup>So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?”

<sup>18</sup>When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

### DISCUSS

*Leader asks, anyone responds.*

- ⊙ How did the conversion of Cornelius’ family represent a fulfillment of Isaiah 49? Why do you think it was so difficult for Jews (including Peter) to accept Gentiles into the church community?
- ⊙ What did it take to change Peter’s perspective? How did God change Peter’s heart?

## COMMENTARY

*Leader reads beforehand or aloud during the group.*

When the Holy Spirit told Peter to go to Cornelius' house, Peter immediately felt the tension between identity and mission. With the words of Jesus still ringing in his ears—"and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8)—he would have to accept the responsibility of taking this good news to extremely foreign people and places.

As a devout Jew, he had never entered a Gentile home, but as a follower of Jesus, he was being called to not only eat with a Gentile but to preach the gospel to him. Visiting the home of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, was not only a violation of Peter's ethnic upbringing but a reckoning with the trauma of the Roman empire against the Jewish people. Nevertheless, Peter is challenged by God on the Joppa rooftop to lift his eyes beyond the familiar borders of ethnicity and culture to see the fields white with harvest. Peter's finite view of God's purpose and bullish ethnocentrism nearly jeopardized his participation in God's mission. For all of his devotion to the cause of Christ, there were still gaps in his understanding of the will of God for all people. In order to obey God, the oppressed would need to share the gospel of forgiveness with his oppressor.

## GOPEL HOPE

*Leader to read aloud during group.*

***God's global mission affirms the goodness of all ethnicities and cultures while challenging our tendency toward ethnic and cultural idolatry.***

Participating in God's global mission often makes us culturally uncomfortable because it requires that we lay down our ethnic and cultural preferences to become agents of reconciliation in the world. As a Jew, it was unthinkable for Peter to eat "unclean" Gentile foods (like pork or shellfish) because these foods were not only seen as "disgusting" but as morally degrading. However, it was this cultural preference that was keeping him from participating in God's mission to Cornelius. Likewise, Cornelius, in order to receive Peter's message,



## RACE, INJUSTICE & DISCIPLESHIP

had to set aside his notions of Roman cultural superiority. This required sitting at the feet of an unknown Jewish fisherman from Galilee and listening to the story of a crucified Jewish Messiah who was calling all people—including Romans—to follow him as Lord and savior. It was only in obeying the Holy Spirit that Peter and Cornelius were able to resolve the tension between mission and identity.

### DISCUSS

*Leader asks, anyone responds.*

- 🗨 How has following Jesus and participating in his global mission caused you to see the inherent dignity and goodness of other cultures and ethnicities?
- 🗨 How has following Jesus and participating in his global mission challenged your own tendency to idolize your own ethnic and cultural identity?

## CONFESS & PRAY

20–30 MIN

- ☑ Listen in silence to the Holy Spirit for two minutes and reflect on these two questions:

**REPENT:** Is there anything I need to repent of—**prejudice, apathy, unforgiveness, self-righteousness, or ethnic idolatry?**

**MISSION:** What cultural preferences or idols are keeping me from participating in God’s mission—especially toward ethnic others?

- ☑ Open the floor for participants who feel led by the Spirit to pray aloud a specific prayer of repentance and/or commitment before God and those in your group. (Ex., “Lord, I repent of . . .” or “Lord, I commit to . . .”) Be specific. Be honest. And be concise.
- ☑ Pray that God would lead us by his Spirit to the mission field beyond our cultural comforts as ministers of reconciliation.

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***Motherless Child*** (1899)

*Sometimes I feel like a motherless child*

*Sometimes I feel like a motherless child*

*Sometimes I feel like a motherless child*

*A long ways from home, a long ways from home*

*True believer*

*A long ways from home*

*A long ways from home*

*Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone*

*Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone*

*Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone*

*A long ways from home, a long ways from home*

*True believer*

*A long ways from home*

*A long ways from home*





WEEK SIX

# INDIVIDUALS & INSTITUTIONS

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. . . . He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.”

**Revelation 21:2, 4–5**

“As I sat there, I thought myself a fool for having tried to fix situations that were so fatally broken. It’s time to stop. I can’t do this anymore. For the first time I realized that my life was just full of brokenness. I work in a broken system of justice. My clients were broken by mental illness, poverty, and racism. They were torn apart by disease, drugs and alcohol, pride, fear, and anger . . .”

**Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy***

## SHARE & LISTEN

20-30 MIN

*Leader asks, everyone responds.*

- 🗨 If you could fix just one aspect of racial injustice on an institutional level, what would it be? Why do you think institutional change is so difficult?
- 🗨 What, in your opinion, is more difficult—solving racism in the soul or in the system?

## READ & DISCUSS

20-30 MIN

### OLD TESTAMENT READING

*Ask a group member to read aloud.*

#### Amos 9:11–15

<sup>11</sup> “In that day I will raise up  
the booth of David that is fallen  
and repair its breaches,  
and raise up its ruins  
and rebuild it as in the days of old,  
<sup>12</sup> that they may possess the remnant of Edom  
and all the nations who are called by my name,”  
declares the Lord who does this.

<sup>13</sup> “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord,  
“when the plowman shall overtake the reaper  
and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed;  
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,  
and all the hills shall flow with it.

<sup>14</sup> I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel,  
and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them;  
they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine,  
and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.

## RACE, INJUSTICE & DISCIPLESHIP

<sup>15</sup>I will plant them on their land,  
and they shall never again be uprooted  
out of the land that I have given them,”  
says the Lord your God.

### NEW TESTAMENT READING

*Ask a group member to read aloud.*

#### **Acts 15:1–19 NIV**

<sup>1</sup>Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” <sup>2</sup>This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. <sup>3</sup>The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad. <sup>4</sup>When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

<sup>5</sup>Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.”

<sup>6</sup>The apostles and elders met to consider this question. <sup>7</sup>After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. <sup>8</sup>God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. <sup>9</sup>He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. <sup>10</sup>Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? <sup>11</sup>No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

## RACE, INJUSTICE & DISCIPLESHIP

<sup>12</sup>The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. <sup>13</sup>When they finished, James spoke up. “Brothers,” he said, “listen to me. <sup>14</sup>Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. <sup>15</sup>The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

<sup>16</sup>“After this I will return  
and rebuild David’s fallen tent.

Its ruins I will rebuild,  
and I will restore it,

<sup>17</sup>that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord,  
even all the Gentiles who bear my name,  
says the Lord, who does these things’—

<sup>18</sup>things known from long ago.

<sup>19</sup>“It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.”

### DISCUSS

*Leader asks, anyone responds.*

- 🗨 Why did certain Jewish followers of Jesus try to make Gentile disciples adopt Jewish customs and follow Jewish laws? What do you think their motive was?
- 🗨 Why did Paul, Barnabas, and Peter oppose this practice? Why did this dispute require an institutional solution (i.e., a church council) as opposed to individual pastors and churches working things out on their own?

### COMMENTARY

*Leader reads beforehand or aloud during the group.*

Peter’s reckoning with the will of God on the roof in Joppa proved to be a turning point in his life and the family of Cornelius. However, this interpersonal revelation was not enough to sway every Jewish believer or

## RACE, INJUSTICE & DISCIPLESHIP

church leader—most of whom still assumed that salvation was only for the Jews. Almost two thousand years of Jewish religious tradition was at stake, and some leaders still demanded that the Gentiles assimilate into the Jewish tradition. Paul and Barnabas, who wanted to remove cultural barriers for Gentiles coming to faith, appeared before the Jerusalem Council to make their case. Peter shared his own story and spoke up for the Gentile disciples, risking his reputation with his fellow Jewish believers.

Blinded by their traditions, some Jewish leaders didn't realize that attempts to assimilate Gentiles into Jewish Mosaic customs would constitute a devaluing of an ethnocultural identity that was ordained by God. Peter brings the work of the Holy Spirit into focus on this issue, underscoring that faith in Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit were the only qualifications for Christian fellowship. In the spirit of Jesus, Peter, Paul, and Barnabas brought the kingdom values to bear on an entrenched socioreligious system.

### GOSPEL HOPE

*Leader to read aloud during group.*

***The Church is called and empowered to not only restore sinful souls but to reform unjust systems.***

Peter could have easily been satisfied with reaching Cornelius' family with the gospel, but there was more at stake than just one Gentile family. Gentile believers in numerous cities were being forced to "become Jewish" in order to be recognized as Christians. This was more than an issue of individual Jewish ethnocentrism; it was an institutional problem requiring an institutional solution. This is why the Jerusalem Council was called—to make doctrinal and institutional changes across the church that would remove unnecessary cultural barriers from Gentile believers. Partnering with God to establish his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven involves the kind of gospel transformation that changes both people and the structures they create.



## DISCUSS

*Leader asks, anyone responds.*

- 🗨️ What kinds of solutions to racism and injustice do you tend to gravitate toward—personal transformation or institutional reformation? Is anything lost if we only pursue one and not the other?
- 🗨️ How does this story from Acts 15 give you hope that the gospel has answers for racism on an individual and institutional level?

## CONFESS & PRAY

20–30 MIN

- ☑️ Listen in silence to the Holy Spirit for two minutes and reflect on these questions:
  - REPENT:** Is there anything I need to repent of—prejudice, apathy, unforgiveness, self-righteousness, or ethnic idolatry?
  - REFORM:** Are there broken people in my life who need transformation? Are there broken institutions in my community that need a reformation? What small step is God calling me to take today?
- ☑️ Open the floor for participants who feel led by the Spirit to pray aloud a specific prayer of repentance and/or commitment before God and those in your group. (Ex., “Lord, I repent of . . .” or “Lord, I commit to . . .”) Be specific. Be honest. And be concise.
- ☑️ Pray that God would give us godly wisdom, favor, and influence to reform unjust systems. Pray that God would give us courage and boldness to speak up for the marginalized and oppressed.

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***I Want To Be Ready (1916)***

*I want to be ready*

*I want to be ready*

*I want to be ready*

*To walk in Jerusalem just like John*

*Oh John, Oh John, what do you say*

*Walk in Jerusalem just like John*

*That I'll be there at the coming day*

*Walk in Jerusalem just like John*

*I want to be ready*

*I want to be ready*

*I want to be ready*

*To walk in Jerusalem just like John*

*John said the city was just four-square*

*Walk in Jerusalem just like John*

*And he declared he'd meet me there*

*Walk in Jerusalem just like John*





# CONCLUSION

Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

**2 Corinthians 13:11**

As we conclude this material, we believe that this is not the end but only the beginning of greater things. We hope that through this time of discussion, Bible study, and prayer, God was able to expand your vision for the kind of change that he wants to establish in and through the Church. Scripture teaches us that having been reconciled to God through Christ, he has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation. As his ambassadors, we are sent into the world to make the appeal of repentance and forgiveness. Rather than seeing this resource as a final destination, we invite you to embrace the ministry of reconciliation as a lifelong calling.

# RECOMMENDED BOOKS

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***Free At Last?: The Gospel in The African American Experience***

by Carl F. Ellis Jr.

A classic work that analyzes the African American experience in America through a historical and theological lens.

***Let Justice Roll Down*** by John M. Perkins

A classic memoir from a longtime civil rights activist and advocate of gospel reconciliation.

***Roadmap To Reconciliation 2.0*** by Brenda Salter McNeil

An important work on the process and pathway to racial reconciliation in the Church and society.

***Divided by Faith*** by Michael O. Emerson & Christian Smith

A seminal sociological study on racial relations and division in American evangelical churches.

***Beyond Racial Gridlock*** by George Yancey

An important book that analyzes secular approaches to racism and offers a biblical model for understanding systemic racism and gospel solutions.

***Better Together: Crossing the Divide in South Africa*** by Roger Pearce

A collection of powerful stories from Every Nation Southern Africa about overcoming racial divides in the Church and society after Apartheid.

***Just Mercy*** by Bryan Stevenson

A sobering but redemptive memoir of a civil rights lawyer who addresses racial inequality in the criminal justice system in America.

# RECOMMENDED VIDEOS

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## **Duke Kwon, "What Is Racism?"**

City to City North America, March 27, 2019

<https://youtu.be/H-fNsdkj920>



## **Michael Emerson, "Race and the Church"**

Henry Center, Dec 6, 2012

<https://youtu.be/T0Bgq6VIPcw>



## **Tom Skinner, "Racism and World Evangelism"**

Urbana Missions, Jan 19 2015

<https://youtu.be/bvKQx4ycTmA>

